



State of Connecticut

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March 23, 2009

Chairman Thomas Gaffey, Chairman Andrew Fleischmann, Ranking Member Sam Caligiuri, Ranking Member Marilyn Giuliano and other distinguished Members of the Joint Committee on Education

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of *SB 1142, An Act Concerning Relief of State Mandates on School Districts*.

In listening carefully to local board of education members, board of selectmen and towns councils it became clear that we need to provide them with relief from added financial burdens that cannot be borne under the constraints they are now experiencing. A Ridgefield Board of Education member expressed that "mandate costs are passed on to local taxpayers who are in full scale revolt against any more tax increases." Mandates that may have merit and made sense when enacted may no longer be feasible given the economic climate our state and towns now face.

I understand how state mandates burden towns by requiring them to carry out state policies with little or no state funding, because I served as chair of a local school board, a selectman and a member of the state education board during the previous state recession. SB 1142 has identified in-school suspension as a burdensome mandate. The feedback many of us in the legislature have received from our local boards corroborate the concerns that SB 1142 seeks to remedy.

Members of the Bethel, Ridgefield, Westport and Wilton Board of Education have all written to express the concerns of most school systems in the district regarding the costs of staffing and administering in-school suspensions. The delay in the implementation date will provide municipalities an immediate savings on costs associated with housing students on-site during their suspension periods and allow municipalities more time to implement a long-term plan for meeting the intent of the law.

In addition to those concerns, the members of Bethel Board of Education provided insight that in-school suspensions "while possibly appropriate for larger cities, is not helpful for districts such as Bethel." A member of the Ridgefield Board of Education expressed its reservation about the effectiveness of in-school suspension in a letter they submitted: "It is hard to justify a statewide mandate which has no measurable objective, will have unintended consequences, will incur significant costs, and for which most districts are inadequately prepared."

At a time when all budgets are being scrutinized, the implementation of a mandate which increases annual costs significantly must demonstrate a substantial benefit. Unlike large schools systems that may experience numerous suspensions in a given year, in-school suspensions for small to average sized

schools systems may not produce the same cost versus benefit result. As our economy recovers, it may prove useful for us to focus on new funded programs for school systems with a high number of suspensions. I strongly encourage the committee to approve SB 1142 for our financially strapped school districts and to revisit this issue in the future as much has been learned since the initial passage of this mandate.

Thank you for your thoughtful and careful consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Toni". The letter "T" is large and stylized, with the "oni" following in a cursive script.

Toni Boucher
State Senator